

Urban Nomad

I am seeking to address the affordability model from a couple of directions. I thought it an interesting approach to begin by rationalising the community's expectations of consumption, and then to look at how the built environment has evolved to meet that demand. What does housing affordability mean other than to gauge how much society as a whole expects to sacrifice in order to have a place to live? If that sacrifice is rated high, then affordability is raised as an issue. We can therefore address this in one of two ways, make the sacrifice lower by reducing costs or make the standard easier to attain by adjusting expectations.

If we can ask society to accept a different way of living, which will be offered as a lower-cost alternative, perhaps we can reach some compromise between the two.

To develop this investigation, we should ask, "What are the necessities of life?". It used to mean (and in many parts of the world still does) "water, food and shelter". In some developing countries it means "hot water, dining out, apartment living". In our advanced Western society, many expect internet access, king-sized bedrooms with ensembles, game consoles and a car for the kids. It is in the latter example that we are framing the question of affordability. Is our expectation as consumers and as architects pandering to a standard that is above what is actually "needed". Is affordability really a reflection of what society requires or merely what it has come to expect?

Subconsciously, we are all conditioned by our contemporary environment to consume objects. I am acutely aware of my participation in this cycle and believe our built environment contributes by way of following a trend. Our "throwaway" society tolerates waste and places little value on efficiency or clever solutions. In the past, technology promised to improve our lives, but it has become a feature-filled parade of the latest market fad that you "simply must have". I concede there is a core list of necessary possessions, however, I would like to attempt to propose a living condition in which, by a process of radical reduction, a person's home might reverse this pattern of overconsumption.

The ability to imagine one's life without requiring a truck to move house is a prerequisite to a life in a new housing typology. The living approach, that I suggest, segregates one's needs from wants, essentials from luxuries.

In share accommodation such as student housing and backpacker hostels, a pooling of resources is expected. It reduces cost. In upmarket hotel and apartment living, having all modern conveniences separated is the norm. I propose that somewhere in between is a happy compromise.

Consider an apartment-style development, where the units have no kitchen, no bathroom, no storage, only a 5-star hotel standard bedroom. What if the volume of space that you owned in this environment was not-fixed within the building much like a hot-desk scenario in an office. You own a unit but it is a living space like all of your neighbours. If you don't like those neighbours, you transfer within the building to another identical unit. If you don't like that building you transfer to another building in the same complex, city, country or continent, all under the same model of housing.

To adapt to living in this new environment means to limit the accumulation of possessions and truly decide what are the necessities that you require. The building is a matrix of similarly constructed rooms with identical features designed to deliver a high standard of accommodation. The missing rooms, bathroom and kitchen, are located on the commercial levels where automatic gym membership and access to the custom-designed restaurant/cafe facilities are an entitlement of tenancy within this income-producing complex.